RESEARCH BRIEF

WHAT DRIVES VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA?

Drivers of Violence in South Africa

Research shows that there is no single cause of violence in South Africa. Rather, several risk factors come together in different ways, depending on context, to enable violence. The most significant risk factors include social and economic inequality, frustrated masculinity, lack of social cohesion, and alcohol and firearms. In order to prevent violence and address its effects, we need to understand how these multiple and intersecting factors converge to result in violence.

This research brief outlines the literature on drivers of violence in South Africa and then puts it in context by summarising views on violence among community members who work with CSVR in four local communities. The brief shows that violence prevention initiatives need to move beyond a cause-and-effect approach that focuses on episodes and types of violence. We should see violence as a web, with criss-crossing forms that blur the line between victim and perpetrator as they evolve over time. To understand violence in South Africa, we need to stop talking about a 'culture of violence' and pay attention to how context turns the risk of violence into a reality.

South African Violence Research

With South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994, the focus of violence research in the country shifted from addressing political violence towards preventing violence between individuals and remedying its social, economic and psychological effects. In line with global trends, researchers also largely abandoned developing grand theories of violence and concentrated instead on an ecological approach to understanding and preventing violence.[1]

In the ecological model, violence results from complex interactions and factors that emerge from nested systems—at the social, community, family and individual levels. This model gave rise to the public health approach to violence prevention, an interdisciplinary perspective that has become dominant in South Africa.[2] Combining psychological, sociological and criminological thinking
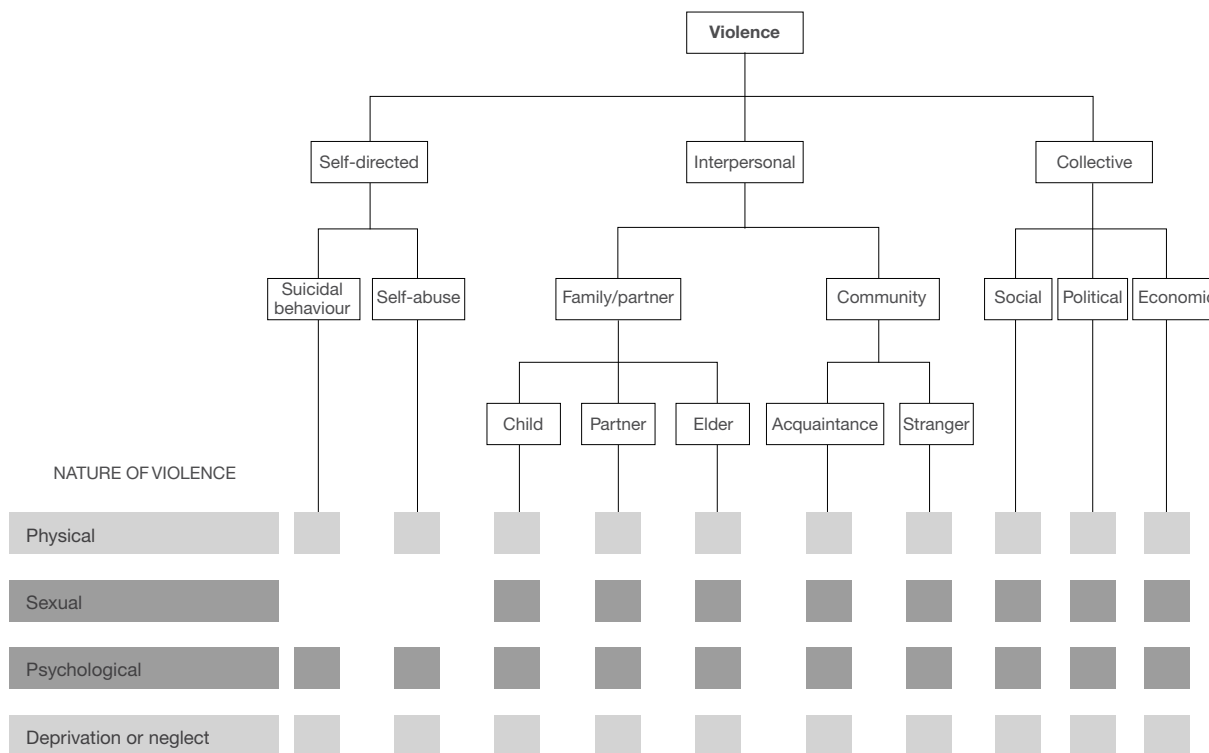
The World Health Organization defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation."

on violence, the public health approach offers a typology of violence. It categorises violence as self-directed, interpersonal or collective.

Self-directed violence refers to thoughts or actions oriented towards suicide or self-harm. Interpersonal violence is divided into two forms: family and community. Family violence is perpetrated between family members and intimate partners inside the home. Community violence is perpetrated by people who may or may not know each other, usually in public places. Collective violence, meanwhile, is motivated by political, economic and social factors.[3]

Violence research since apartheid has primarily focused on four forms of interpersonal and collective violence: homicide, sexual and gender-based violence, youth violence and violence against children, and protest-related public violence. South Africa is consistently among the countries with the highest levels of this violence. At about 34.1 murders per 100,000 people per year,[4] rates of homicide in the country are very high, with cases of intimate femicide counted as the highest in the world.[5] Twenty-five percent of South African women experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime,[6] and new studies suggest that even more experience non-partner violence.[7] The rate of child homicide in South Africa is about twice the global average, with the rate 1.25 times higher for boys than girls and five times higher for boys between the ages of 14 and 17.[8] The country's rates of violence between youth are nine times higher than the global average.[9]

World Health Organization Typology of Violence

Violence
- Self-directed
  - Suicidal behaviour
  - Self-abuse
- Interpersonal
  - Family/partner
    - Child
    - Partner
    - Elder
  - Community
    - Acquaintance
    - Stranger
- Collective
  - Social
  - Political
  - Economic

NATURE OF VIOLENCE

Nature of Violence	Suicidal behaviour	Self-abuse	Child	Partner	Elder	Acquaintance	Stranger	Social	Political	Economic
Physical	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Sexual			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Psychological	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Deprivation or neglect	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

Source: Rutherford et al., 2007.

Collective violence in South Africa, meanwhile, saw a 155 percent increase between 2004 and 2015. Research shows that of public protests, those most likely to become violent are motivated by vigilantism (97%), demarcation disputes (87%), xenophobic incidents (84%), housing (70%), water (72%), elections (71%) and political party disagreements (65%).[10] Possibly because the public approves of any method that might reduce violent crime, South Africa has also seen an alarming rise in police torture, with reported cases increasing from 50 in 2012–13 to 145 in 2014–15. Although this form of violence mirrors apartheid-era political repression, in the post-apartheid period it is primarily targeted at suspected criminals and those in custody.[11]

While the types and degrees of violence vary, research shows that the four forms of violence outlined here are connected by a set of common and intersecting risk factors—the drivers of violence in South Africa.

Social and Economic Inequality

Inequality is a super-driver of violence. Research shows that fatal violence tends to occur in places with high levels of social and economic inequality, although often in combination with other risk factors.[12] Colonialism and apartheid continue to mark South African society, and socioeconomic inequality—which has increased since the democratic transition—still follows racial lines.

Studies suggest that the hopelessness, shame, guilt and stress associated with inequality, constraints on life opportunities and limited resources give rise to violence in the country, particularly in the context of a 26.6 percent unemployment rate.[13] In South Africa's patriarchal society, where men are generally expected to be unconditionally powerful providers, not having the resources to play this role creates the conditions for violence.[14] Poverty increases the likelihood of being both a perpetrator and a victim of gender-based violence, and especially intimate partner violence.[15]

For youth, socioeconomic marginalisation also affects the quality of primary education and ability to acquire a tertiary education, limiting life opportunities and validating violence as a way to secure social standing and access material goods, often through gang-related activities.[16] Violence, both interpersonal and collective, can seem like a legitimate tool for improving one's economic situation in light of others' lavish displays of wealth.[17]

Gender and Frustrated Masculinity

In a society where powerful patriarchs are valued but inequality limits resources, frustrated masculinity can enable violence in multiple ways. In South Africa, men are seven times more likely to be victims of homicide than women, and they are disproportionately the perpetrators. The highest rate of male homicide is among those aged between 15 and 45, when men are most likely to pursue masculine ideals.[18] Homicides between men often occur in the context of entertainment where alcohol is being consumed.[19]

In violence between men and women, men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators. This gender-based violence usually involves the assertion of power and control, as in the case of intimate partner violence. Research shows that gender discipline is a motivation in youth violence, including individual rapes and

homicides, particularly for adolescent men in gangs.[20] Gender discipline is also a driver of collective gender-based violence, namely gang rape or rape by multiple perpetrators over time, which research suggests is used similarly to rape in wartime, to assert dominance over women and prove it to other men in contexts where idealised masculinity appears under threat.[21]

Gender roles can drive other forms of collective violence as well. Research suggests that in protest-related collective violence, men rely on demonstrations of support and adulation by women to engage in violence. Violent protests are often heavily gendered, with men initiating violence while women applaud it.[22]

(Lack of) Social Cohesion

Research shows that a quick turnover in neighbours, migration from rural to urban areas and rising poverty—common trends around South Africa—tend to loosen social ties and networks in neighbourhoods, decreasing social cohesion.[23] Low social cohesion has been linked to a reduced capacity to cope with the stresses of low-income living, and to high rates of violence.[24] For example, disruptions in social networks, or lack of them, may isolate and increase the likelihood of intimate partner violence among women already at risk. They may also encourage youth to establish new social bonds that lead to violence and substance dependence.[25]

Paradoxically, members of marginalised communities may identify common grievances that build social cohesion in such a way that it enables violence. For instance, research suggests that a sense of economic disenfranchisement has led heterogeneous communities to seek out a shared bond as South Africans and to engage in xenophobic attacks on non-nationals. This means that (lack of) social cohesion is a complex and sometimes counterintuitive driver of violence.

Alcohol and Firearms

Alcohol and firearms, especially together, are primary drivers of both fatal and non-fatal violence. Over 50 percent of homicide victims test positive for alcohol, and studies of femicide show that the bulk of both victims and perpetrators have alcohol in their system at the time of the crime.[26] Firearms, meanwhile, were the highest cause of death among youth in South Africa between 2001 and 2009, and the rate of women killed by firearms in the country has been the highest globally.[27]

Woven into the history of South Africa through colonisation, alcohol continues to be consumed widely in social situations. High levels of unemployment combined with population density have been shown to lead to high demand for alcohol, and the prevalence of informal trading and criminal supply networks in the country makes alcohol production and distribution difficult to regulate.[28] The combination of alcohol and firearms with idealised masculinity in South Africa's patriarchal context significantly raises the likelihood of various types of violence.[29]

Global research shows that interventions targeted at alcohol distribution and access to firearms reduce rates of violence, particularly in the short term. They do not, however, address the more systemic risks represented by inequality and other risk factors. Our resources should be committed primarily to understanding and addressing these more deeply rooted drivers of violence.

Drivers of Violence in Context

Violence research in South Africa shows that socioeconomic inequality, frustrated masculinity, and lack of social cohesion connect and overlap to drive violence, especially in combination with alcohol and firearms. The injustices implied by displays of wealth amid poverty and high unemployment, gender norms that are difficult to live up to in the absence of resources and life opportunities, and communities fragmented by apartheid legacies and competition for resources create the conditions that enable violence. Combined, they increase the risk of homicide, gender-based violence, youth violence and violence against children, and collective violence.

For several years, CSVR has been working with community members in Marikana, Kagiso, Johannesburg Inner City and Ekangala to deepen its understanding of drivers of violence and to develop evidence-based intervention models that are tailored to those communities. In interactions with CSVR community workers and in their responses to a CSVR survey on drivers of violence,[30] members of all four communities identify unemployment, poverty and inequality as key drivers of violence overall. They also report that gender inequality and divisions within the community are major drivers, and note that alcohol and drug dependence exacerbate the other risk factors. At the same time, their narratives around violence highlight the way these drivers connect with each other.

Noting that it is young people who primarily engage in robberies, rape and xenophobic violence, they point to unemployment, substance dependence and poor parenting as the main drivers of youth violence. Discussing gender-based violence, members of all four communities note gender inequality, religious and cultural beliefs often grounded in patriarchy, and alcohol as primary drivers, but not always unemployment and other symptoms of economic exclusion. Collective violence in the communities is seen to be driven by poor service delivery, corruption and competing political agendas.

Importantly, community members argue that, on any given day, a resident could be both a victim and a perpetrator of violence, and that lines between the two are not clear-

Lerato, age 13
Resident of Marikana
Lerato said that she and two other girls were abducted on their way to primary school. An unemployed man who is known to the community took the girls to his shack and forced them to smoke cannabis. He repeatedly molested them, threatening to kill them if they told anyone about the attack.

Teachers at Lerato's school noticed that she was often late or did not attend classes after this incident. Lerato's mother was unaware of the problem until a community worker brought it to her attention. Shocked, she asked for Lerato to be transferred to another school. Lerato eventually dropped out. CSVR community workers are providing emotional support to Lerato and her family.

DJ, age 45
Resident of Kagiso
DJ reported to CSVR community workers that he and his friends were assaulted returning home from a tavern late at night. DJ was stripped naked and beaten until he was unconscious. One of his friends died from injuries sustained in the assault. The perpetrators were allegedly police.

DJ is presenting with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. He has been referred to one of CSVR's psychosocial supporters for counselling.

cut. They also note that forms of violence can morph over time. For example, a community protest against poor service delivery can end in rape, robbery or murder.

While members of the four communities identify the same drivers of violence, they report different outcomes in terms of forms of violence. In Marikana, community members suggest that rates of physical and sexual abuse of children and intimate partner violence have been high since the 2012 police massacre of striking miners, and linked this to substance abuse and excessive weekend drinking by men. In Kagiso, community members report high rates of armed robbery, but also collective violence associated with service delivery protests. They also note that police harassment and violence against young men are a common occurrence in the area. In the inner city of Johannesburg, community members highlight xenophobic violence by South African civilians and police, specifically against African non-nationals engaging in informal trade and hawking. In Ekangala, the main issue has been rape and other forms of sexual violence, with the perpetrators often known to the community but not behind bars.

Responses to the CSVR survey show the extent to which context influences the way various drivers actually lead to violence and the forms it takes. The selection of narratives told to CSVR community workers further illustrates the complexity of each context.[31]

Thando, age 34
Resident of Johannesburg
Inner City
Thando left Burundi due to civil war, following her husband to South Africa. They have four children. The marriage has been characterised by abuse.

After one of the times her husband assaulted her, Thando was admitted to hospital. Her husband was arrested but community members, mostly men, encouraged Thando to drop the charges. She did so because she feared the financial implications of his imprisonment.

Thando continues to live in fear of violence at the hands of her husband. She is receiving counselling from CSVR community workers.

Madimabe, age 48
Resident of Ekangala
Madimabe was the victim of attempted rape three years ago. The perpetrator was reported to the police and arrested but the matter is still pending in court.

Because the perpetrator is Madimabe's neighbour, she was highly traumatised by the attack and still lives in fear. She is receiving counselling from CSVR community workers.

Acknowledging the Web of Violence

Violence research in South Africa has shown that drivers of violence are interconnected and overlapping. CSVR's research in the four communities shows that types and acts of violence are similarly interconnected and overlapping, sparking and renewing each other over time and allowing those who are victims of violence to also be perpetrators of violence, and vice versa.

Co-occurrence Framework for Violence

| **Role: Involvement in violence** | | |
Victim	**Perpetrator**	**Both**
Single episode or emphasis on a single type		
Mono-victim		Mono-perpetrator-victim
Also studied under the name of:		
Acute	Specialist	Bully victim
Isolated		Mutual IPV
Single form exposed		
Multiplicity: Patterns across types of violence		
Poly-victim	Poly-perpetrator	Delinquent victim
Also studied under the name of:		
Multiple type victim		
Multiple victim	Generalist	
Multiple crime-type victim	Violent polymorphism	
Multiple form exposed		
Complex trauma		
Repetitiveness: Patterns across time		
Repeat victim	Repeat perpetrator	Repeat perpetrator-victim
Also studied under the name of:		
Repeat victim	Recidivist	Cycle of violence
Chronic	Habitual offender	Intergenerational transmission
Complex trauma	Reconviction	
	Revolving doors	
	Career criminal	

Source: Hamby and Grych, 2013.

While the public health approach to understanding and preventing violence is useful because its typology makes violence easier to quantify and allows for targeted interventions, it also simplifies social realities in ways that often hide how exactly risk factors lead to violence. We advocate for a different approach that takes into account the 'web of violence.'[32] Here, violence is not always cause-and-effect; rather, acts, types and forms of violence, as well as victims and perpetrators, are interconnected threads woven into a complex web by a specific context. This framework covers individual episodes and forms of violence, with a single victim and perpetrator, as well as multiple and intersecting episodes and

forms of violence, with multiple victims and perpetrators who change roles depending on the situation. It also covers the repetition and evolution of violence over time, taking into account cycles of violence and the intergenerational transmission of violence.

The 'web of violence' better reflects how members of the four communities in which CSVR works describe violence: it varies over time, criss-crosses type and involves multiple accounts of victimhood and perpetration, depending on the space and time in which it occurs. With the extensive research done on violence to date,[33] the drivers and consequences of violence in South Africa are well documented. The research shows that talking about a 'culture of violence' is not enough—it is time to acknowledge the web of violence and the importance of context in designing violence prevention interventions.

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